



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Valerie Ervin

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Montgomery Councilmember Valerie Ervin, Food Recovery Work Group Announce Action Plan to Implement First County-wide Food Recovery Program in the Nation

*Group Will Detail What is Needed to Create a Program to
Help the Hungry and Reduce Food Waste, on Tuesday,
Sept. 10, at Montgomery College in Rockville*

ROCKVILLE, Md., September 3, 2013—Members of the Montgomery County Council's Food Recovery Work Group, the president of Montgomery College, the director of Public Policy for the Capital Area Food Bank, non-profit leaders, private sector partners and community advocates will join Montgomery County Councilmember Valerie Ervin at 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 10, at Montgomery College's Rockville campus to detail the steps needed to create a food recovery program in Montgomery County. Once in operation, it is believed that the program will be the nation's first county-wide food recovery program.

The event will take place in the student lounge located in the student center of the Montgomery College campus at 51 Mannakee Street in Rockville. Parking is available in Parking Lot 5, just off North Campus Drive. (NOTE: For parking map, see: <http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/edu/maps.aspx?id=23746>).

In a report that will be released to the County Council at its general session on the morning of Sept. 10, the County's Food Recovery Work Group will present a roadmap for establishing a streamlined process for collecting unused, edible food and distributing it to non-profit providers who serve the hungry. Councilmember Ervin

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brought together all of the partners in a Council-appointed work group, which met for eight months to develop recommendations on how to create a food recovery program in the County.

“We needed to hear from our non-profit providers, faith-based institutions and community advocates who deal directly with helping those in need about where the gaps are and what they needed to better serve families who are food insecure,” said Councilmember Ervin. “My hope is that the Council, which unanimously voted to create this work group, will again join with me to implement these recommendations so we can start a streamlined distribution system to get unused food directly to those who need it most.”

Creating a county-wide food recovery program is also an outgrowth of February’s SNAP the Silence Challenge, spearheaded by Councilmember Ervin. Participants in the challenge—including all members of the County Council and hundreds of others—agreed to live on a food budget of \$25 for five days. That is the approximate average amount allotted to the nation’s neediest residents through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP was formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.

“The SNAP Challenge was truly an eye-opener for me and many of the hundreds of people who participated,” said Councilmember Ervin. “Now we are in a position to take action by moving ahead with recommendations to develop a program to help reduce hunger and help those in need and our working families.”

Some cities have food recovery programs, such as the D.C. Central Kitchen in Washington, D.C., and City Harvest in New York City. However, it is believed that Montgomery would be the first county to implement this type of program. The Manna Food Center is Montgomery County’s main food bank and nearly every non-profit organization that deals with food insecurity issues relies on Manna to provide food for their clients. This food recovery effort would enhance existing resources for Manna and other non-profit groups in a new way.

Food insecurity is a nationwide challenge. The Capital Area Food Bank reports that 40 percent of its clients must choose between paying for food and paying for other necessities like housing, utilities, medical care and transportation.

In Montgomery County, the economic downturn has forced more people than ever to ask for public assistance. In 2012, the self-sufficiency standard (the minimum income families require to achieve financial security) for a family of four in Montgomery County was approximately \$82,877. One-third of students in Montgomery’s public schools qualify to receive Free and Reduced Price Meals (FARMS).

Councilmember Ervin was motivated to start a food recovery effort in Montgomery County after she saw the work that student volunteers were doing at the University of Maryland. Students Ben Simon and Mia Zavalij created a model of food redistribution called the Food Recovery Network at the College Park campus. As of May 2012, the University of Maryland chapter had collected and distributed enough unused food to create more than 30,000 meals. Nationally, the organization has

generated 135,000 meals. After helping launch food recovery programs at colleges across the United States, the organization is becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the mission of replicating the model in other communities.

“When I saw the amazing job the students at University of Maryland were doing, I thought, ‘Why aren’t we doing this in Montgomery County?’” said Councilmember Ervin. “Hunger is an ever-increasing problem in our community, and many of our working families struggle to put food on the table. Since we have numerous public institutions and private sector partners who dispose of unwanted food, it seemed like a no brainer for the county to follow the lead of the students who began the food recovery movement.”

There also is an environmental component to the initiative. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, in 2011, more than 36 million tons of food waste is generated annually in the U.S. In Montgomery County, approximately 19 percent of the waste stream is made up of food.

“The food recovery initiative will not only help our area non-profit organizations who fight hunger, but should also reduce the amount of food that ends up in our waste stream,” according to Councilmember Ervin. “In my mind, this initiative is a win-win as those who donate food receive tax benefits and those in need receive healthy meals.”

The Food Recovery Work Group, which was organized by Councilmember Ervin and created by Council resolution, was charged with evaluating the costs associated with creating a county-wide food recovery program and developing a strategic action plan for implementation. This group also evaluated best practices for food recovery and distribution; identified existing resources and ways to enhance communication among non-profit organizations, service providers, and food suppliers; and recommended policy changes to assist in these efforts.

For more information on how a food recovery effort works, view a clip from County Cable Montgomery about the University of Maryland Food Recovery Network at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ1iX1KzFTA&feature=youtu.be> .

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